OPAL asks 'What does winter feel like?'

22 December 2011 - The stereotype of the cold-hardy northerner and the southern-softy may be no more than a myth, according to early results from a survey carried out by the Met Office and Open Air Laboratories (OPAL).

The findings come from research which aims to look at how people perceive and respond to temperature - asking whether and why 5 °C might feel different depending on where you live.

While the survey is set to continue through this winter to see how the colder months affect our behaviour, early data from the project so far suggest some surprising results.

Mark McCarthy, Climate Scientist at the Met Office said: "This research questions our stereotypes about how we feel temperatures. It has long been known that people can acclimatise to their environment, so we might expect people in the cooler north to feel the cold less than people in the south. Initial results suggest this might not be the case, however, and we all feel temperatures in the same way.

"What is really interesting is that these early results suggest it may be more appropriate to say people in the north and in rural areas are more pragmatic - as they're more likely to reach for a coat when it gets colder than city-dwellers and those in the south."

There is already evidence to suggest towns and cities can generate their own microclimates which affect local temperature, wind, clouds, and even rain. This research aims to see if that affects how people in cities respond to the weather.

Dr McCarthy added: "We are continuing the OPAL thermal comfort survey through the winter. Anyone can take part and we are encouraging as many people as possible to get involved so we have some comprehensive results to carry out our research."

To find out more about the surveys, watch this video:

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